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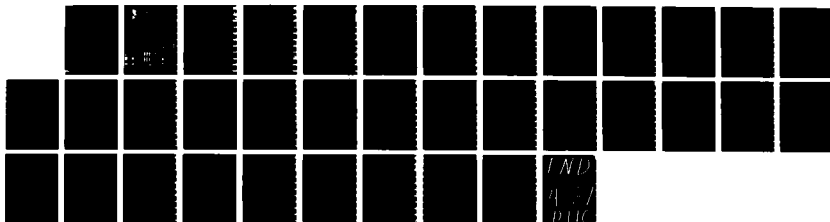
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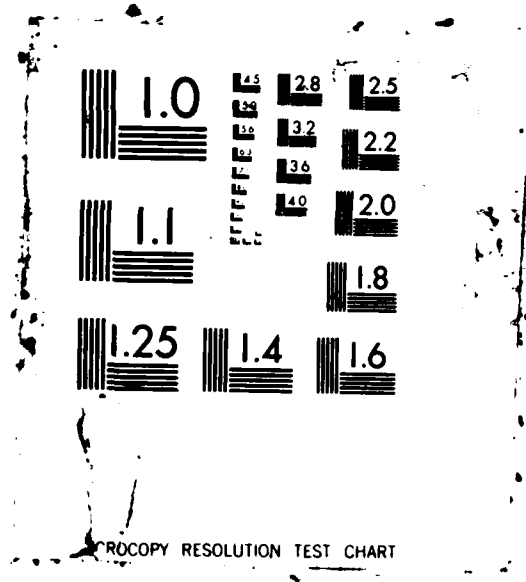
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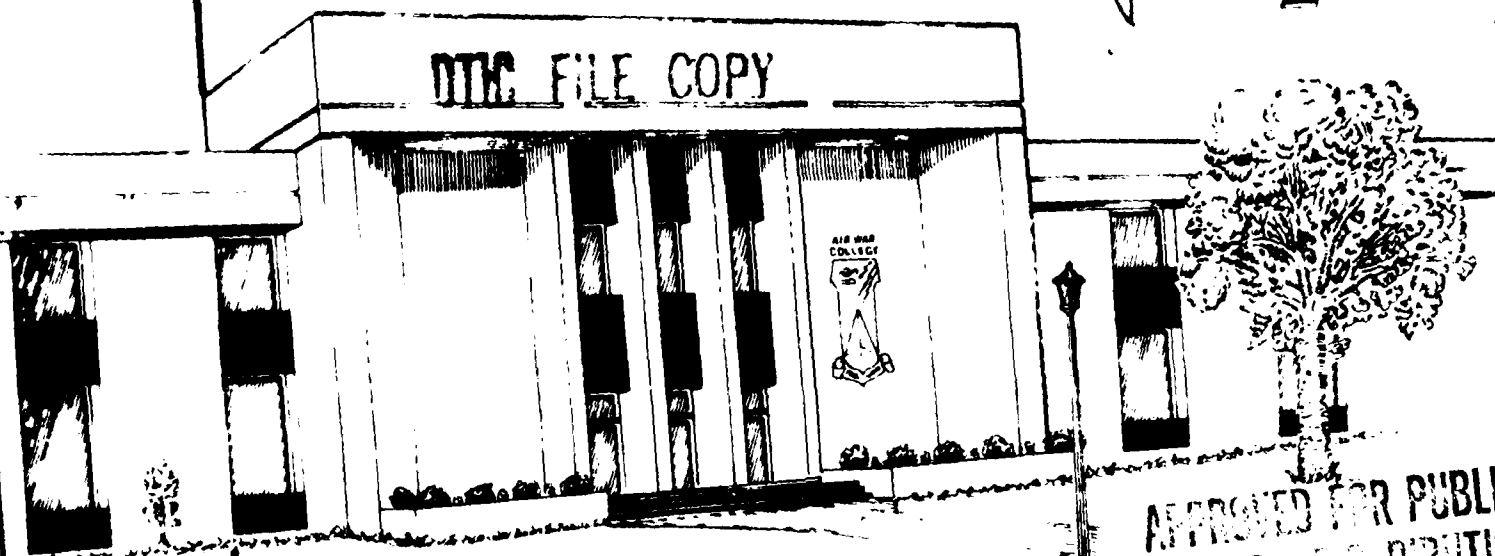
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SOVIET INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN:  
CAUSES AND FUTURE OPTIONS

By COLONEL DAVID C. GREGORY

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Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan:  
Causes and Future Options

by  
David C. Gregory  
Colonel, USAF

A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
IN  
FULFILLMENT OF THE RESEARCH  
REQUIREMENT

RESEARCH ADVISOR: Colonel Michael E. Cavanaugh

MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

MAY 1986

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AIR WAR COLLEGE RESEARCH REPORT ABSTRACT

TITLE: Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan:  
Causes and Future Options

AUTHOR: David C. Gregory, Colonel, USAF

Examines six causative factors leading up to the Soviet decision to invade Afghanistan. Paper disagrees with commonly held view that the Soviets moved into Afghanistan primarily to improve their strategic position vis-a-vis the United States in the Persian Gulf area. Instead asserts that the principle reasons for invasion were predicated on: the tenets of the Brezhnev Doctrine; growing instability on the Soviet Southern border; and the perception that the move was a low-risk operation. Paper also examines future Soviet courses of action to meet their objectives and concludes that the present force level/strategy will continue for the foreseeable future.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Colonel David C. Gregory (MAI, Webster College) has been interested in the Soviet motives behind the decision to invade Afghanistan for several years. His interest in Afghanistan was first manifest by his trips through this area of the world as a MAC C-141 aircrew member. Subsequently, he was assigned to the Air Staff where he worked as the South Asia desk officer in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion. Colonel Gregory's assignment prior to Air War College was the Chief of the Special Plans Division, Headquarters United States Air Forces Europe. He is a graduate of the Air Force Squadron Officers School and Air Command and Staff College. Colonel Gregory is a member of the Air War College, Class of 1986.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of the December 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the dominant theme postulated by United States political and military leaders was that this action was part of a Soviet grand design or master plan for controlling Persian Gulf resources and ultimately the world. Press releases contained the oft' heard phrases about Soviet "desires for warm water ports" on the Indian Ocean and potential moves into Pakistan, Iran and the Persian Gulf. This rhetoric gave the invasion of Afghanistan a totally offensive/opportunistic character and one that presupposed further Soviet moves on the heels of this action. President Carter in his now-famous "Carter Doctrine" speech of January 23, 1980 graphically illustrated this emphasis by stating that:

....the implications of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan could pose the most serious threat to the peace since the Second World War....The region which is now threatened by Soviet troops in Afghanistan is of great strategic importance. It contains more than two-thirds of the world's exportable oil. The Soviet effort to dominate Afghanistan has brought Soviet military forces to within 300 miles of the Indian Ocean and close to the Strait of Hormuz, a waterway through which most of the world's oil must flow....(8:122)

In response to the Soviet aggression and its perceived implications on world order, the United States took some reactive political/economic measures such as a grain embargo and the shelving of the SALT II Agreement as well as some military measures to include greater Indian Ocean naval presence and the establishment of the Rapid Deployment Force

[RDF]. (9:123) These were necessary and positive steps aimed at precluding further Soviet advances. Unfortunately these actions had little if any impact on the Afghanistan situation as evidenced by the fact that there are still over 120,000 Soviet troops in the country and the fighting continues with no end in sight.

In retrospect, the occupation of Afghanistan by Soviet military forces has provided them with greater strategic leverage and it would be foolish to claim that this was not a factor in their decision to invade. But were strategic considerations, such as the quest for southward expansion the only or even the primary reason for the invasion? I believe the answer to this question is a definite no and further believe that close examination of the factors involved in the invasion decision is extremely important because unless the United States comes up with the correct response, its ability to deter or counter future similar Soviet actions will be diminished.

Due to the closed nature of the Soviet society, it is unlikely that the United States will ever discover what the actual determinate behind the invasion decisions were; however, I believe by closely examining the world and regional situation leading up to December 1979 we can determine with some degree of accuracy why the decision to invade was implemented by the Kremlin. Therefore, the purpose of this paper will be to look into the several factors that historians and political analysts believe went into the Soviet decision-making process. Through this

review, I hope to demonstrate that the primary short-term goals of the Soviet invasion were not expansionist in nature (although it certainly was a long-term benefit), but primarily an attempt to combat an unstable condition in a socialist state that borders directly on the Soviet Union. In addition, the paper will attempt to show that the cumulative effect of these many causative factors formed the belief in the minds of the Soviet leadership that the invasion of Afghanistan was a low risk venture. Following this discussion we will briefly look at future Soviet options in Afghanistan. With this as a point of departure, let's take a closer look at the factors involved in the Soviet invasion decision.

## CHAPTER II

### REASONS FOR SOVIET INVASION

Placing the blame totally on Soviet desires for expansion is a very shallow and simplistic approach to a very complex issue. There were several other causative factors involved in the Soviet decision which included:

- 1) The Historical Perspective
- 2) The Brezhnev Doctrine
- 3) Protection of the Motherland
- 4) Growth of Islamic Fundamentalism
- 5) The Perceived Lack of U.S. Will
- 6) Deterioration in Detente.

The above factors are not listed in any order of importance, but merely provide a logical sequence for discussing the issue. First let's look at the:

#### Historical Perspective

The United States' attitude toward Afghanistan since the early 1950s could best be described as indifference and acceptance of the fact that Afghanistan needed good relations with the Soviets due to their common border.

Robert G. Neuman, U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan from 1966-73, summarized the U.S. views on Afghanistan in a 1971 Policy Review for the State Department as follows:

For the United States Afghanistan has at the present limited direct interest, it is not an important trading partner; it is not an access route for U.S. trade with others; it is not presently....a source of oil or scarce strategic metals;....there are no treaty ties or defense commitments; and Afghanistan does not provide us with significant defense intelligence, or scientific facilities...(8:26)

In that same Policy Review statement Neuman also summarized Soviet-Afghan relations as follows:

The United States has long understood that Afghanistan has had little choice but to have close relations with the USSR. Among the factors are the long border, the slowly developing desire to transform the economy and the concomitant need for massive economic assistance; the decision to have a modern military force; and the intermittent preoccupation with its quarrels with Pakistan. The Soviets responded to these opportunities and since 1953 they have assiduously exploited the situation and developed a strong position here with considerable and growing influence and leverage.(8:27)

In this regard, several times during the 1950s and 1960s the Afghan governments under King Zahir and President Daoud often sought U.S. assistance in the Pushtun tribal issue with Pakistan and for military equipment sales; but each time the requests were denied. With each rejection the Afghan government turned to the next logical choice, the Soviets, who were more than willing to accommodate the Afghan requests. Thus, over the years Soviet presence continued to grow in all aspects of the Afghan society while U.S. lack of interest remained fairly constant.

Indifference remained the watchword of U.S. policy during the Carter administration. Other than veiled objections to growing Soviet influence, the U.S. showed minimal interest in the April 1978 coup that deposed President Daoud with the Communist Khalqi government. In addition, in the aftermath of the coup and the subsequent assassination of the American Ambassador on 14 February 1979, the U.S. began to downgrade the already small U.S. presence, reduce aid to Afghanistan and recall all American

dependents.(3:400) This near-total American disengagement coupled with the historical precedent of indifference must have given the Soviets the impression that they had an almost "carte blanche" authority to influence events in Afghanistan without fear of significant U.S. reprisals.

Keeping the preceding in mind, the discussion will now look at a second factor.

#### The Brezhnev Doctrine

Following the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia the following statement, which came to be called the Brezhnev Doctrine, appeared in Pravda:

There is no doubt that the peoples of the socialist countries and the communist parties have and must have freedom to determine their countries' path of development. However, any decision of theirs must damage neither socialism in their own country, nor the fundamental interests of other socialist countries, nor the worldwide workers' movement....This means that every communist party is responsible not only to its people, but also to all the socialist communist movement.(5:137)

In essence this says that once a state is accepted into the communist camp it can never leave and the other members of the movement, particularly the Soviet Union, have the right and responsibility to police those members who stray from the straight and narrow. Although the Afghanistan government under both Taraki and then Amin were for the most part following the Soviet lead, it was becoming readily apparent in 1979 that internal unrest in the country could result in the collapse of the Marxist regime and its replacement by a government of uncertain orientation.

If this occurred the Soviet image could have been damaged in the following ways:(9:135)

- 1) It would destroy the myth that the masses everywhere desire communism since in Afghanistan you would have the first example where a popular uprising overthrew a Marxist government.
- 2) It could threaten the USSR's fragile hold on Eastern Europe where so many of the countries despise Soviet domination, but feel they have no recourse but to submit. It appears to be a consistent fear of the Soviet Politburo that if one communist regime were to escape others might try the same.
- 3) Soviet support from third world communist countries such as Cuba, Mozambique and North Korea is dependent on the Soviets maintaining a reputation for providing support to members of the communist world when and where needed. Backing out of Afghanistan could jeopardize the Soviet's influence with and over these countries.

The Soviets did try to influence the Taraki and Amin governments to slow down the programs of social change that were causing the unrest; but the Afghan government, which was gradually coming more under the control of the radical Amin, refused to listen. It appears Soviet frustrations with Amin may have precipitated a Soviet plot through Taraki in September 1979 to oust Amin, but the action backfired, Taraki was killed and Amin's position/policies solidified.(8:114) When this action failed it appears the

Soviets felt there was no recourse but to physically remove Amin so the communist movement in Afghanistan could survive and the tenets of the Brezhnev Doctrine remain intact. The Soviet commitment to this view is manifest in Secretary Brezhnev's statement to the communist world in October 1980 that, "The revolutionary process in Afghanistan is irreversible." (15:A24)

A third factor influencing the Soviet decision to invade focuses on the Soviet propensity to defend the motherland at all costs.

#### Protection of the Motherland

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was portrayed by the U.S. administration and media as an unprecedented act of overt aggression. The dominant theme coming from the spokesmen of the Carter administration was that the Soviets were abandoning their former policy of using proxies to instigate/support revolution and were now undertaking direct military actions aimed at expanding their influence. This may be the primary reason why the U.S. government viewed the Soviet invasion as a precursor to later moves into the Middle East and South Asia. However, the view fails to recognize a key difference between this action and other communist third world aggressions and a key similarity between the Afghan invasion and the direct Soviet military moves into Hungary in 1956, and Czechoslovakia in 1968: i.e., Afghanistan borders on the Soviet Union.



Historically the Soviets have always been obsessed with security on their borders, and rightfully so. Soviet history is replete with examples of invasions by hostile neighbors; the latest of which occurred in 1941. From Moscow's perspective the best way to secure their frontiers was to annex border areas such as the Baltic States or to set up an obedient client state in neighboring countries whose loyalty was secured by the presence of large numbers of military and police forces as in Eastern Europe and Mongolia. In my opinion, this is exactly what the Soviets wanted to do in Afghanistan and their willingness to accept the risks involved was predicated on what they perceived to be a deteriorating security situation along their entire southern border.

To further develop this argument let's examine the situation on the Soviet southern border in 1979.

1) The Soviets have always feared the PRC and therefore maintain sizable numbers of military forces on the Chinese border. The Sino-American decision in January 1979 to resume normal diplomatic relations increased the Soviet's fear of a U.S.-Chinese entente in the Far East and media speculation abounded that the U.S. was moving closer to providing China with advanced technology and defensive military equipment. Talk about instability, nothing would scare the Soviets more than a militarily strong China.

2) In Iran the Ayatolla Khomeini was in power and maintaining his distance from both the U.S. and USSR. This relationship was probably acceptable to the Soviets; however, the taking of American hostages by the Iranian government in November 1979 changed the whole situation. In view of the rapid buildup of U.S. naval forces in the Indian Ocean following the hostage taking, the Soviets had to consider and be concerned with a possible U.S. military move into Iran thereby placing U.S. power once again on the Soviet southern border.

3) From the beginning of the Saur revolution in April 1978, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan was destined to have problems consolidating power. First, the PDPA was split into two factions that were diametrically opposed on many issues; the Khalqis under Taraki and Amin and Parchams under Babrak Karmal. Second, the power base of the communist party in Afghanistan was very small to begin with and not likely to grow since communism with its atheistic views was unacceptable to any devout Muslim. Third, competition between Taraki, the weak figurehead, and Amin, the real strongman in the country, came to a head in September 1979 when Amin had Taraki killed and subsequently attempted to purge all non-supporters from the party. This action further eroded an already small communist power base. As a result Afghanistan under the Amin

government was totally inept and on the verge of collapse. The Soviets had to fear that if the Afghan rebels came to power they would establish closer ties with Iran, Pakistan, China, or the United States since the rebels viewed Soviet communism as the enemy and supporter of the oppressive Amin regime.

None of the preceding discussion is meant to condone the Soviet action, but rather to establish a view of the world from which the Soviet invasion decision was made. There was little the Soviets could overtly do to quickly eliminate the security implications inherent in the Iranian and Chinese situations and therefore the most logical choice of action was in Afghanistan. It was the least risky of the possible alternatives and the one that had the added benefit of providing a clear signal to the U.S. and bordering states that the Soviets would go to the extreme to eliminate instability on their borders.

The next factor for discussion focuses on the growth of Islamic fundamentalism on the Soviet southern boundaries.

#### Growth of Islamic Fundamentalism

Many historians contend that a principle factor in the Soviet decision to invade Afghanistan was the perceived need to put down the militant Islamic fundamentalists before their views infected Soviet border republics and precipitated an internal revolt against Moscow. This argument appears to be somewhat specious because although the three potential Islamic Republics (i.e., Iran, Pakistan

and Afghanistan) might cause some difficulty for the Soviet Union among Soviet Muslims, this situation would certainly be manageable. The internal governmental mechanisms in Soviet Central Asia, which include the military and secret police, were well established, dominated by Slavs and continued to be in total control.(9:156) Therefore the possibility of Muslim revolts in the Soviet Union was rather remote.

However, this does not negate the possibility that there was an Islamic connection in the Soviet decision to invade Afghanistan but merely points out that the connection was not tied to Soviet Muslims. It appears a more pressing fear of the Soviets was the successful expulsion of the Khalqi regime by Muslim fundamentalists and the formation of a third Islamic Republic on the periphery of Soviet Central Asia that was linked to Iran and Pakistan. The atheistic tenets of communism were anathema to the Muslim faith and the Soviets probably viewed the anti-American sentiments in Pakistan and Iran as only temporary phenomena. Noted historian, Vernon Aspaturian, in an article entitled "The Afghan Gamble: Soviet Quagmire or Springboard" outlines his views on the Soviet Islamic concerns as follows:

....to allow the Khalqi regime in any form (Taraki or Amin) to collapse internally and be a third Islamic Republic on the southern borders of the Soviet Union, supported initially by two other Islamic Republics temporarily at odds with the United States was also viewed with grave apprehension....

....given the reactionary, anti-communist character of the fundamentalist Islamic Republics, the Soviet leaders calculated that eventually all three would reconcile with the United States. A solid

phalanx of theologically based anti-Soviet Islamic Republics linked with the United States was a frightening prospect.(3:38)

Although the Islamic movement does not appear to be the primary cause for the Soviet invasion, it certainly had to be a consideration in the decision-making process.

Even with all the preceding factors favoring a Soviet invasion, it is unlikely the Soviets would have pushed for the overt attack if they thought the U.S. would respond militarily. This brings us to a discussion of the fifth factor; the perception that the U.S. lacked the will to counter a Soviet military action.

#### Lack of U.S. Will

Throughout the decade leading up to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan relative military strengths of the USSR and United States changed drastically. In the minds of the Soviets their sacrifice of "guns for butter" had paid off in that during this period "the correlation of forces," (i.e., the relative political military, economic and ideological strengths vis-a-vis the U.S.), had shifted in their favor. One only has to review the writings of Soviet leaders to see how this perception of strength changed their views of the world. Prior to the late 1960s the dominant theme in Soviet writings was defense of the "Motherland" but in the early 1970's the theme shifted to a more active role by exhorting that Soviet military forces had the responsibility to defend the socialist community. Marshal Andrei A. Grechko then Soviet defense minister first related this new line of thinking in 1971 when he declared that the Soviet Armed

Forces "serve the noble cause of defending the socialist community and the worldwide historic victories of communism." (5:135) If this statement seemed somewhat vague, Grechko made it even clearer in 1974 when he declared:

At the present stage the historic function of the Soviet armed forces is not restricted merely to their function in defending the Motherland and the other socialist countries. In its foreign policy activity the Soviet state purposefully opposes the export of counter revolution and the policy of oppression, supports the national liberation struggle, and resolutely resists imperialist aggression in whatever distant region of our planet it may appear. (5:136)

In effect, the Soviets seemed to perceive that they could take bolder actions in the world community since they were militarily the equal of the United States.

Although force ratios were a principle consideration in determining the correlation of forces another less quantifiable but equally important factor in the equation was the Soviet perception that the U.S. government lacked the will to respond militarily against Soviet or Soviet supported aggression. The U.S. government was viewed by the Soviets as weak, indecisive and overly hesitant to employ military force as an instrument of foreign policy. Further, Soviet experts on American politics viewed that in the aftermath of Vietnam and Watergate, Congress and the American public were placing ever increasing constraints on the executive branch to ensure that the country never slipped into another no-win military situation; i.e. the Vietnam Syndrome.

In retrospect it is not difficult to understand how the Soviets developed the view that the U.S. was weak-willed and

indecisive. History is replete with examples of the U.S. lack of will during this period. The following summarizes some of the major events:

1) The U.S. both under the Ford and Carter administrations stood by and did virtually nothing while the Soviets and their Cuban proxies supported the establishment of Marxist governments in Angola (1974-76), South Yemen (1977-79), and Ethiopia (1974-78). At the same time the Vietnamese, backed by the Soviets, marched into Kampuchea virtually unopposed. Even in those instances where the U.S. executive branch tried to do more as in Angola and Ethiopia, Congress put the clamps on the operation by cutting off funds since they feared involvement in another third-world guerilla war.(8:39)

2) In the late summer and autumn of 1979 the Carter administration voiced strong political protest to the Soviets over the presence of a "combat brigade" in Cuba and demanded its removal. Only a few weeks later the administration backed down from its demands, appealed to the Congress not to have the incident affect the SALT II ratification and then approved the sale of grain to the Soviets.(8:140)

3) U.S. cancellation of the B-1 bomber, neutron bomb and additional attack carriers during the Carter administration demonstrated a lack of U.S. resolve to maintain a strong defense capability.(7:400)

4) In late 1979, the U.S. was totally preoccupied with gaining the release of the American hostages in Iran, but seemed virtually powerless to make it happen. Taken individually these events may not be significant, but grouped together the Soviets probably surmised that a stepped-up military move into Afghanistan would probably evoke little more than the usual U.S. rhetorical response.

One final factor that had to play in the Soviet invasion decision was the deteriorating state of detente with the United States.

#### Deterioration of Detente

From the Soviet perspective there were many events occurring in the United States and the world which indicted that detente was not providing all the benefits they wanted. Specifically the following actions would have helped to develop such a view:(8:140)

- 1) The August 1977 U.S. Presidential Directive calling for the creation of Rapid Deployment Force.
- 2) The NATO May 1978 promise to increase defense budgets.
- 3) The NATO decision to employ GCLM and Pershing II missiles in West Europe.
- 4) The U.S. administration's inability to push the SALT II ratification through Congress and
- 5) The expanding U.S.-Chinese relationship.



This is not meant to imply that the Soviets were above reproach during this period because the aggressive actions discussed in the preceding section certainly disprove this. However, the Soviets have tended always to look at detente as a one-way street which they try to use to their advantage. Therefore the above events in their eyes would certainly impact U.S.-Soviet relations and the Soviet leadership may have reasoned that even if an invasion further eroded detente it really did not matter since these relations were strained already. Marshal Shulman, Adviser on Soviet Affairs to former Secretary of State Vance, believes this deterioration of detente was an important ingredient in the Soviet decision on Afghanistan. As Shulman recounted after the invasion: "Relations between Washington and Moscow were already so bad that the Soviets had no inhibitions about displeasing us." (12:114)

### CHAPTER III

#### SYNOPSIS OF THE SOVIET DECISION

Individually the preceding factors do not provide sufficient cause for an invasion decision; however, collectively they provide a formidable argument. Henry Bradsher in his book "Afghanistan and the Soviet Union" aptly described this process when he wrote:

If Soviet leaders had ever read Uncle Remus they might have recognized in 1979 that they had gotten hold of an Afghan "tar baby." The years of cultivating a communist party, in a country that Marx in his European economic frame of reference would never have recognized as being ready for communism, had finally -- if somewhat surprisingly -- produced a regime to which the Soviets found themselves stuck. (5:126)

With this in mind, let's try to put all the factors together in an attempt to determine how the Soviets got their hands stuck on this "tar baby."

1) In retrospect the entire process began with the communist overthrow of the Daoud government in April 1978. It appears the communist takeover may have caught the Soviets somewhat by surprise because historically they have preferred to establish a power base in a country before accepting a new regime into the communist sphere. Unfortunately this was not the case in Afghanistan since the Taraki/Amin government came into power with little popular support and then made matters worse by instituting reforms before they had developed an adequate military/secret police mechanism to control the populace. In spite of this shortcoming, the Soviets welcomed the Khalqi party into

the communist world. In effect, the Brezhnev doctrine was now a player since Soviet prestige and growing financial commitments were then directly linked to the continued survival of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA).

2) As indicated above the Taraki and Amin regimes began to implement massive social reform programs throughout the country before they had effectively consolidated their power. This sparked large-scale opposition to the central government from all sectors of the Afghan society beginning in early 1979. Now not only was Soviet prestige on the line, but there was the added security dimension of growing instability on the Afghan-Soviet border. If you couple the rebellion in Afghanistan with the growing Islamic movement in Iran/Pakistan and improved U.S.-PRC relations it becomes easy to see how the Soviet paranoid view could lead the Kremlin to think that the security situation on their southern border was getting out of hand. Initially the Soviets tried through diplomatic and subsequently covert means to moderate the policies of the Afghan communist party, but these attempts proved fruitless. The Soviets seem to have drawn the conclusion that they were being taken for a ride by the Amin government and that their only recourse was direct military intervention to remove Amin and replace him with a more pliant leader.

3) Historically the Kremlin leadership has been very cautious about committing Soviet military forces outside the Warsaw Pact and the Afghanistan decision was probably no exception. If one closely examines prevailing U.S. attitudes toward Afghanistan and the overall world situation in the decade prior to December 1979 it is not difficult to understand how the Soviets would consider the Afghanistan invasion a low-risk venture. The U.S. appeared to lack the will to respond and the Soviets certainly had a decided advantage in being able to deploy, employ and sustain military forces in Afghanistan. In spite of the assumption that the U.S. would not respond, the Soviets did try to fend off negative world opinion by stating that they had moved into Afghanistan at the invitation of the local government. Unfortunately for the Soviets, in this particular case, their explanation was not accepted since it was hard to convince the rest of the world that Amin would request that the Soviets come into the country to execute him. In spite of this lack of logic in the Soviet argument, to this day they still openly declare that they entered Afghanistan only at the request of the Afghan government. Obviously the Soviets believe they must continue this line of logic to ensure domestic support for continued operations in Afghanistan as well as to set the stage for what they must hope will be a resolution of the situation that meets their interests.

4) Finally, much like the United States mistake in Vietnam, the Soviets probably were convinced that the Afghan rebels were no match for the Red Army. In addition, I don't believe the Soviets ever really understood that the Mujihadeen held them, as well as the PDPA, responsible for the repression in the country. Therefore the Soviets probably surmised that they could move in quickly, depose Amin, replace him with Karmal, remove the repressive social reforms to quell the rebellion, and then return to business as normal. In retrospect, this may have been the greatest oversight in the Soviet decision-making process because now they are bogged down in a fight to the finish with the rebels.

In my opinion, the preceding discussion provides the most logical assessment of why the Soviets decided to invade Afghanistan. The Soviets perceived that they had an immediate problem that needed to be fixed in a hurry and they took what they considered to be the appropriate action based on the risks and benefits. Granted in the long-term this action, if successful, would also provide strategic benefits, vis-a-vis the Western World and the Persian Gulf, but this appears to be more of an extra added attraction and not the principle reason for the invasion.

## CHAPTER IV

### FUTURE SOVIET STRATEGY

In consideration of the preceding discussion and the many views postulated throughout my research, there appears to be a fairly strong consensus that Soviet objectives in Afghanistan were and continue to be:

- 1) Maintaining a pro-Soviet communist regime in Afghanistan.
- 2) Defeating rebel forces thereby eliminating the cause of instability.(1:31)

Many politicians, historians and political analysts throughout the world have proposed various diplomatic initiatives to resolve the present stalemate. These range from forming a coalition government in Afghanistan, to implementing a "finlandization" approach or establishing a neutral, non-aligned state.(6:61) Unfortunately, none of these political solutions seem feasible for implementation anytime in the foreseeable future since it appears to be totally impossible to ever come up with an agreement acceptable to both the communist and non-communist camps. The following quote from a Soviet citizen in mid-1980 really gets to the heart of the matter:

In terms of a political settlement, there's nothing we can offer that the other side -- that is Pakistan, Iran or the West -- will accept. There's nothing that they're going to offer which will allow Babrak Karmal's regime to be established which we can accept. And therefore, here we sit.(8:184)

In retrospect, the above Soviet objectives can probably only be met through the continued presence of military

forces in Afghanistan. Should the Soviets withdraw these forces it would only be a matter of time before the rebels overthrew the present government. This then implies that there are only two viable alternatives for the Soviets to pursue: 1) send in more troops for a quick win; or 2) continue present force levels/strategies. Let's examine these two options to determine which is more likely to occur:(6:60)

OPTION 1: Increased Soviet troops - There appears to be little doubt that the Soviets could defeat the rebels if they decided to commit sufficient forces to the task. Estimates on the numbers of military forces required for such a strategy range from 400,000 troops on up. To date the Soviet Politburo has rejected this option and will probably continue to do so in the future. A massive growth of Soviet forces would increase the costs of the war in both financial and personnel losses, get Afghanistan back into the public limelight and reduce Soviet capabilities to defend their borders in other more critical areas (i.e., China and Western Europe). Based on these risks the likely Soviet decision will be to continue with their present policies/force deployments.

OPTION 2: Continue the Present Strategy - The fact that the present force level (approximately 120,000) has remained fairly constant over the past six years would imply that the Soviets believe their present course of action is basically correct. It appears the Soviets believe they can keep the requisite pressure on the rebels, slowly

consolidate their position and gradually wear down the opposition. The war is costing the Soviets men and resources, but obviously the costs are bearable or they wouldn't still be there. This is not the first time the Soviets have tried to impose their will on an anticommunist people. In fact Soviet efforts to control the Muslim population in the Caucasus and Central Asia back in the 1920s and 30s took almost 15 years to complete. Based on this and other historical precedents in Eastern Europe and Mongolia, we can expect the Soviets to be patient and persistent in Afghanistan anticipating a gradual triumph over rebel forces.

In the short term, the Soviets are striving to control the urban areas and trying to drive the support base for the rebels out of the countryside. Noted South Asian historian, Louis Dupree, refers to the Soviet policy as a combination of "Rubblization and migratory genocide." Through indiscriminate bombings and burnings of villages, Dupree believes the Soviets are trying to force the local population out of the country or into the cities so that the Soviet military can isolate and then destroy the rebels. With almost four million refugees in Pakistan and Iran, and cities such as Kabul bursting at the seams with new arrivals from the countryside, this strategy appears to be working fairly effectively.(8:160)



In the long term, the Kremlin's strategy appears to focus on the "Sovietization" of Afghanistan. This presupposes the development of a party/administrative apparatus modeled along Soviet lines and totally sympathetic to Soviet interests. This strategy will entail rebuilding the Afghan army/secret police; indoctrinating the Afghan youth to the beliefs of communism; and absorbing Afghanistan totally into the Soviet economic community.(1:32) This will be a challenge for the Soviets since no outside power has ever been able to subjugate and dominate the will of the Afghan people. The Soviets appear once again in their long-term strategy to be taking the slow, deliberate approach which involves training thousands of Afghan youth in the USSR; revamping the Afghan education system along Soviet lines; and implementing massive propaganda/indoctrination programs throughout the country. Obviously the Soviets believe these short- and long-term measures, which are similar to the ones used in the Caucasus and Central Asia more than 50 years ago, will again prove to be successful. Although the Afghan people are courageous fighters, it is difficult to imagine how they could defeat the Soviets in this type of drawn-out, protracted strategy unless they are provided additional support from the non-communist world.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The preceding discussion has looked briefly at the many factors involved in the Soviet decision to invade Afghanistan. The purpose of this review was to demonstrate that the Soviet attack was not solely or even primarily part of a Soviet grand design for control of Persian Gulf resources, but more an effort to maintain a communist regime in Kabul and to reduce the growing instability on the Soviet Southern border. In addition, world events such as the U.S. preoccupation with Iran and the Soviet perception that the U.S. lacked the will to intervene certainly made the Soviet decision easier. The bottom line of all this research is that there was really no one factor that caused the Soviet invasion, but rather a series of events and perceptions that developed over the years which culminated in this final aggressive act. In retrospect, at the time of the Soviet invasion there was probably very little the United States could do to prevent it from occurring. Prevention would have required the undoing of many years of indifference toward Afghanistan and a drastic shift in the Soviet perception that the U.S. lacked the ability and will to counter such an act.

The second part of the paper looked at future Soviet courses of action and concludes that the present strategy of Sovietization of the country will continue into the future. This will consist of a long-term, dedicated Soviet effort to remake the Afghan Society in the image of the USSR through education and indoctrination of the populace and continued efforts to destroy all remaining rebel groups. This won't be an easy task for the Soviets since the Mujihadeen are rugged, dedicated soldiers who have pledged to continue the fight to the bitter end. The prospects are that the Soviets over time will eventually wear down the resistance of the freedom fighters unless the United States and non-communist world can somehow make the costs of this venture too high for continued Soviet presence. This will require the U.S. to maintain a credible military deterrent capability; strengthen regional friends/allies such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia; and provide economic, political and military support to Afghan refugees/rebels.

In addition, this review also suggests that the U.S. must never forget that the Soviet propensity for direct military involvement will most likely occur when the country involved borders the Soviet Union and is a communist state about to be overrun. Had the U.S. recognized the consequences of a communist takeover of Afghanistan prior to the April 1978 coup and issued stern warnings to the Soviets backed by political, military, and economic actions, it may have been possible to prevent the subsequent attack. As it turned out, once the Soviets recognized and accepted the

PDPA into the Soviet sphere, Secretary Brezhnev's pronouncement that "the revolutionary process in Afghanistan is irreversible" became locked in concrete.(15:A24)

Hopefully, the U.S. remembers this very important lesson from the Afghanistan invasion and applies it diligently to future similar situations.

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